

July 16, 2025

Stanley Potter
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Honorable Stephanie A. Gallagher

My name is Stanley Potter. I am writing to offer a character reference for Mark Unkenholz. I recently retired from the National Security Agency (NSA) after 40 years of service as a cryptographer. I have known Mark Unkenholz for 32 years. Mark served as one of my supervisors for about two years until 1994 in a branch focused on machine cryptanalysis, and then as technical director from 2001 and onward for the organization that is currently called the Commercial Engagement Center (Center). Mark provided technical direction and career advice to me for the majority of my career while serving in these capacities.

Mark shared his passion for commercial cryptography with many other NSA cryptographers, engaging us with his findings in commercial cryptographic research, and keeping us up-to-date on the state-of-the art developments in this very specialized field. He genuinely cared about maintaining a healthy collective knowledge of commercial cryptography at the NSA.

The assistance Mark rendered following a Center reorganization exemplifies his kindness. The Center dismantled the organization in which I worked and paired me with a supervisor who showed little interest in assigning me projects in the field of cryptography. He brokered a deal in which I could stay in the Center and continue working in the cryptographic skill field which best suited me and which I enjoyed.

I actually knew and worked with Mark's wife before I met Mark. Although I do not know the details of the past struggles of their marriage, their willingness to recommit to each other demonstrates their fortitude and resilience in the face of difficulties.

The prosecutorial process has devastated Mark. Commercial cryptography was his life and passion. It has ruined his reputation and that of his family. One of his sons is a brilliant mathematician who once held a desire to follow in his father's footsteps in serving his country. Now his son is unable to go through the process to obtain the necessary clearances to work for NSA. NSA has lost not only Mark's services, but the services of his son as well. The inability of Mark's son to follow him in service has crushed him. Mark has slowly accepted the reality that he may never get a chance to contribute to the field of cryptography or work for his country.

The impact of the loss of Mark's skill and talent to NSA is subtle. Few people have his ability to understand and articulate the equities of signals intelligence and cybersecurity which helps senior leaders arrived at balanced solutions for difficult national security questions. His abrupt departure denied NSA the opportunity to prepare future leaders in the nuanced art of equities assessment.

Mark spent his career developing a knowledge base of commercial cryptography, ensuring that the knowledge base endures, developing future cryptographers, and advising senior leaders at NSA. It is my hope that Your Honor will take into consideration his dedication to his family, to his colleagues at NSA, and to his country in the sentencing phase.

Respectfully submitted,
Stanley Potter